

**BOBBY JINDAL**  
GOVERNOR

State of Louisiana



**DAVID LACERTE**  
SECRETARY

## Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs

August 18, 2014

U.S. Army Environmental Command  
ATTN: SPEA Public Comments  
2450 Connell Road, Building 2264  
Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, TX 78234-7664

To Whom it May Concern:

As Secretary of Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs (LDVA) and Chair of the Louisiana Military Advisory Council, I have witnessed first-hand the positive impact Fort Polk has on the state of Louisiana and am proud to share with you many of the positive measures Louisiana has contributed to the success of Fort Polk. I hope you use this information to positively influence any action towards Fort Polk in regards to the Army's Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Assessment (SPEA) for Army 2020 Force Structure Realignment.

As Fort Polk and JRTC have become the Army's premiere training ground, the state of Louisiana has invested heavily in infrastructure improvements in and around Fort Polk in recent years. For example, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development recently completed four-lane highway expansion for the main roadways leading to and from Fort Polk. A new school was built just outside the gates of Fort Polk to support service members' families, and a new U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs outpatient health clinic recently opened its doors to support the healthcare needs of Veterans, including those who retired from Fort Polk.

As you may know, LDVA worked in close partnership with Fort Polk to establish the Central Louisiana Veterans Cemetery located just outside the gate of Fort Polk to offer a dignified final resting place for Veterans, their families and deceased military members. LDVA also operates five state-of-the-art Veterans Homes which offer long-term care for Veterans, spouses and Gold Star parents.

LDVA works closely with Veterans of the Fort Polk area to help them secure the VA benefits they earned through their military service. Louisiana is one of the few states to provide one-on-one counseling for VA benefits with Veterans Service Offices located across the state. Through LDVA Veterans Service Offices, Veterans and military retirees of the Fort Polk area received nearly \$155,000,000 in VA compensation and pension benefits in Fiscal Year 13. This translates to money directly in the pockets of local Veterans which significantly impacts the Veterans' quality of life and provides a boost to local economies. LDVA recently invested in additional counselors to its Leesville office specifically to address the needs of Veterans who reside in that area including those who have recently transitioned out of the military, the vast majority of whom had been stationed at Fort Polk.

Louisiana has rightly earned the reputation of being a very military- and Veteran-friendly state as evidenced by its strong legislative support. Some examples include tax exemptions for military retiree pay; higher homestead exemption rates for disabled Veterans and their spouses; laws to recognize military training when applying for complementary civilian professional and occupational licensing; support for military spouses by cutting through red tape when spouses apply to transfer their professional or occupational licenses; strong focus on workforce development in congress with military training; and low Veteran unemployment rates. Louisiana is also known as the Sportsman's Paradise and as such, allows Veterans and military members to receive free or reduced hunting and fishing licenses. All of these and more demonstrate Louisiana's commitment to its military and Veterans,

including the service members and their families who reside at Fort Polk and those who choose to stay in Louisiana once their military service is complete.

I recognize that the Army faces difficult decisions in order to reduce its budget. However, I strongly urge you to consider not only the items I have listed here but also the overall positive impact Fort Polk has on Louisiana. Fort Polk is a vital part of our state and should remain intact in order to keep central Louisiana a vibrant part of our culture and our economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like any additional information.

Sincerely,

David LaCerte  
Secretary, Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs  
[www.vetaffairs.la.gov](http://www.vetaffairs.la.gov)  
(225) 219-5000

DL/rk

CC:

LA Senator John R. Smith  
LA Representative James K. Armes, III  
LA Representative Frank A. Howard  
Fort Polk Retiree Council  
Louisiana Military Advisory Council